

2008

Counselor-client connection

Sarah Larsen-Kos
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2008 Sarah Larsen-Kos

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Counseling Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Larsen-Kos, Sarah, "Counselor-client connection" (2008). *Graduate Research Papers*. 1074.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1074>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Counselor-client connection

Abstract

In counseling profession, numerous techniques exist to assist counselors in helping clients with challenges. Although several types of strategies can be implemented by counselors, few strategies exist that are useful for majority of clients. Discussed in this text is one possible strategy that can be used with numerous types of clients and circumstances. This tool is the development of a supportive counselor-client connection, specifically used in a school setting. Benefits of this strategy include clients' feelings of support and encouragement, easing of student transitions and difficulties, increased self-esteem and general well-being, and academic and social progress. Additional considerations also noted within the text include a discussion of counselor-client connections in regards to dual-relationships and ethical decision making.

COUNSELOR-CLIENT CONNECTION

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,
and Postsecondary Education
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

by

Sarah Larsen-Kos

December 2008

This Research Paper by: Sarah Larsen-Kos

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION FOR COUNSELING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Education.

Jan Bartlett

12/10/2008
Date Approved

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Michael D. Waggoner

12/17/08
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational
Leadership, Counseling and Postsecondary
Education

Abstract

In counseling profession, numerous techniques exist to assist counselors in helping clients with challenges. Although several types of strategies can be implemented by counselors, few strategies exist that are useful for majority of clients. Discussed in this text is one possible strategy that can be used with numerous types of clients and circumstances. This tool is the development of a supportive counselor-client connection, specifically used in a school setting. Benefits of this strategy include clients' feelings of support and encouragement, easing of student transitions and difficulties, increased self-esteem and general well-being, and academic and social progress. Additional considerations also noted within the text include a discussion of counselor-client connections in regards to dual-relationships and ethical decision making.

Counselor-Client Connection

Today more than ever before counselors are continually challenged to find effective techniques and approaches to assist clients with various circumstances. Several types of approaches are available to help develop client understanding and ultimately assist the client toward the next steps in life. However, it is difficult to establish solely one approach effective for most clients. One possibility researchers suggest to be helpful to many types of clients is the establishment of a supportive counselor-client relationship (Feller & Cottone, 2003; Halstead, Wagner, Vivero & Ferkol, 2002; Kelley, 1997; Kolbert, Morgan & Brendel, 2002; Tursi & Cochran, 2006). More specifically, a study conducted by Wigfield and Wagner (2005) found when appropriate relationships are established between counselors and clients, counselors are better able to ease client transitions and difficulties. Specifically, in a school setting, the developmental needs of many students can also be supported by this type of counselor connection and can also assist with clients feeling supported (Feller & Cottone, 2003). An appropriate counselor connection can not only help increase clients' feeling of support, but also assist with encouraging clients to work toward growth and success.

Discussed throughout this paper are the benefits of building rapport between student and counselor. More specifically discussed are the benefits of building trust, genuineness, caring, empathy, multicultural competence, and awareness for all students. Also resulting from the counselor-client connection to be discussed are students' feelings of support and encouragement, assistance in easing transitions and challenges, as well as academic and social progress (Feller & Cottone, 2003). Lastly, the controversy surrounding counselor-client dual-relationships will be explored.

Multicultural Competence

Included in the components necessary to building a counselor-client connection is the need for multicultural competence. Research by Holcomb-McCoy (2004) suggest it is imperative for counselors to be multiculturally competent if they are to be an effective counselor. Student populations all around the country are becoming increasingly diverse and counselors need to be able to adjust to these differences in order to have a mutual understanding with their students. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) also found evidence supporting the need for school counselors to understand the impact of culture on the counseling process. Counselors' awareness for student differences in language, values, attitudes, norms, and customs are crucial to consider when building a client-counselor connection (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). The counselor should gain an understanding for how the student thinks, what they value, and how to best relate to them. Finding out more about the student and understanding who they are allows the student to feel the counselor's genuineness to want to help and ultimately this helps to enhance the connection.

Holcomb-McCoy (2004) suggest the key to building relationships and becoming more effective in counseling diverse students is to continually assess one's multicultural awareness and competence. Counselors should constantly monitor their own abilities and skills in order to assure they are able to effectively counsel various students. Today, student populations are becoming so increasingly diverse that the need for school counselors to develop trusting, respectful, and understanding relationships with students is growing. Establishing this type of connection can enhance levels of trust and disclosure necessary to better assist with student concerns. Overall, Holcomb-McCoy (2004) believe

gaining awareness and understanding of student diversity is critical to developing positive client-counselor connections and as a result, allows counselors to more effectively counsel.

Easing Student Transitions

One benefit of building a counselor-client connection is to help ease students' developmental transitions and difficulties. Research by Wigfield, Lutz, and Wagner (2005) found positive implications when counseling programs were designed to help ease student transitions in schools. The authors also found positive results when counselors were responsive to the developmental needs of students (Wigfield et al., 2005). The connection between counselors and students can become a very important source of support for many students, especially during adolescents. However, in some school situations the student to counselor ratios may limit the counselor's ability to develop meaningful connections with numerous students. Despite this limitation, feelings of support do appear to play a role in enhancing student motivation, efforts toward academics and social situations, and assists with students overall well-being (Wigfield et al., 2005).

Many students also experience difficulties with identity formation, belonging, and peer relationships. Often these events can be stressful and extremely challenging for students to cope. Forming a counselor-client connection can at the least help ease the transitions and difficulties many students experience (Wigfield et al., 2005). The feelings of support and encouragement students receive from a counselor, teacher or mentor have increased chances of students becoming more responsive, motivated, have possible increased self-esteem or ability to cope, and may become more actively involved

(Wigfield et al., 2005). Because of the possible benefits resulting from a connection, counselors can play an essential role many students may be missing in their lives. Generally, by forming a caring and professional connection between a student and counselor, the counselor is able to help increase student well-being (Wigfield et al., 2005).

Caring

Caring is another aspect important to consider when building rapport with students. Research on counselor-client connections have found caring connections primarily result in positive outcomes (Halstead, Wagner, Vivero, & Ferkol, 2004). Developing a caring relationship ultimately fosters an open counseling environment. This type of environment allows honest communication to take place which in turn assists the counselor to more effectively counsel students. Caring is seen as a useful tool helping to influence the way in which people think, feel, and behave. By incorporating a caring connection, counselors can guide students to overcome challenges they encounter (Halstead et al., 2004). Generally, a caring connection can assist the counselor in establishing a foundation for both current, as well as future counseling processes.

Relationship-Centered Counseling

Using Relationship-Centered Counseling concepts is another useful method to help build a connection with students (Kelly, 1997). More specifically, the core of Relationship-Centered Counseling practice incorporates intrinsic worth, personal uniqueness, purposefulness, meaningful directionality, and self-actualization techniques (Kelly, 1997). When using Relationship-Centered Counseling techniques it is important for counselors to display empathy, congruent communication, and unconditional positive

regard. These three fundamental counseling techniques are excellent methods to incorporate into the counselor-client connection to enhance student determination and self-esteem. Kelly (1997) also found developing a therapeutic relationship and a bond between counselor and student to be useful in developing the groundwork for the entire counseling experience. Kelly (1997) suggests counselors incorporate relationship-like intentions into counseling such as giving support, building relationships, encouraging the expression and acceptance of feelings, giving feedback, and providing a warm, supportive, empathic environment. Incorporating these techniques can help increase trust, build rapport, and establish a connection which helps students feel accepted, understood, and more comfortable (Kelly, 1997).

Mattering to Others

The concept of mattering to others is another central element to consider when building a connection with clients. Rayle (2006) suggests mattering to others is one of the fundamental needs humans require in order to feel important and significant. Knowing this, it is crucial for counselors to be aware of and use this knowledge to strengthen the counseling processes.

Mattering to others can also assist in shaping students' self-concepts and influence their sense of self. Students are able to recognize if they matter to others when others display interest, care, and feelings of concern for them as a student (Rayle, 2006). Therefore, it is important for counselors to display these concepts towards students in their school. Students should be able to feel a sense of genuineness from the counselor and be able to determine their sincerity to sense they matter to the counselor (Rayle, 2006).

Rayle (2006) suggests counselors can use students' need for mattering by using it to strengthen the counseling relationship. Once students feel they matter to others, such as the counselor, their self-esteem and perceived social support increases and therefore, their overall well-being is enhanced (Rayle, 2006). In addition, students who believe they matter to someone are more likely to be productive, show greater positive outcomes, and have more trust as compared to those who do not feel supported. Without mattering to others, students are more apt to experience higher levels of stress, depression, and lower life satisfaction (Rayle, 2006). Counselors, and other school personnel, can help show students they matter to them by displaying some of these techniques while interacting with students.

Person-Centered Relational Framework

The last area important to consider when forming a connection with clients is the Person-Centered Approach. The Person-Centered Approach includes the core concepts necessary to most effectively counsel students (Feller & Cottone, 2003; Tursi & Cochran, 2006). Included in this approach is the need for counselors to display unconditional positive regard, warmth, genuineness, respect, empathic understanding, and congruent communication (Feller et al., 2003; Tursi et al., 2006). Together these concepts help form a connection between counselor and student. Research found the most important factor in counseling outcomes is determined by the relationship formed between the counselor and client (Turse et al., 2006).

Generally, counselors should be aware of students' perspectives and world views. In order to help the student, counselors must communicate empathy and gain an understanding of their students. The concept of encouraging and showing interest towards

clients through active listening and empathy communicates respect for, and confidence in, students (Feller et al., 2003). In addition, counselors should display kindness and acceptance and develop rapport and understanding of clients' and their perspectives. Developing and using these core conditions can help contribute to counselors effectiveness in helping clients overcome challenges, teach them how to accept themselves, and lastly, how to relate better to others (Feller et al., 2003). Counselors can be most effective when they provide empathy, trust, acceptance, acknowledgement, collaboration, and respect for clients in a safe and open environment. Although these components are not central to every theory, there is strong evidence of its usefulness in building a counselor-client connection (Feller et al., 2003).

Perceptions of Dual-Relationships

One area crucial to consider when developing a counselor-client connection is dual-relationships. It is imperative for ethical boundaries to exist in this type of connection and to avoid inappropriate or inhibiting dual relationships between counselors and students. Although, perceptions of dual relationships within counseling education can vary, professionals should be aware of concerns which may exist. Many faculties trust the abilities of counselors to be able to remain objective and avoid student exploitation when engaged in dual-role relationships (Kolbert, Morgan, & Brendel, 2002). However, counselors should still continually be aware of students' concerns regarding fairness of these relationships and assure no negative impact occurs on students, faculty, or the school environment (Kolbert et al., 2002).

Many dual relationships are considered unethical because of the possibility for exploitation, impairment of the counselor's objectivity, and potential interference of

counselor obligations for promoting students' welfare (Kolbert et al., 2002). Counselors engaging in building counselor-client connections should be aware of risks, but not avoid a connection solely due to fear of possible risks. The benefits of a counselor-client connection seem to outweigh the possibility of encountering unethical issues surrounding dual relationships.

Despite the many benefits surrounding counselor-client relationships, it is crucial for counselors to monitor established relationships and assure they remain ethical. More specifically, counselors should monitor the frequency, duration of contact, types of topics discussed, and location of interactions to assure the appropriateness of each category (Kolbert et al., 2002). Counselors should also be conscious of issues of favoritism, unfairness, and unequal access to resources due to the relationship versus student abilities (Kolbert et al., 2002). Additionally, counselors should monitor the potential impairment of their own objectivity that may lead to exploitation of students (Kolbert et al., 2002). Despite these possible limitations, research has shown as long as the counselor is aware of and abides by the issues concerning the ethical appropriateness of dual relationships, forming a counselor-client connection has been shown to positively contribute to the students' professional and personal development (Kolbert et al., 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, counselors and other school personnel can have a tremendous impact on students' lives. One way counselors can achieve this is through the formation of a counselor-client connection. Through this connection, counselors should be provide support and encouragement, be sensitive to student differences that exist, help students transition through developmental changes, and work through difficulties they experience.

Additionally, counselors should display empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and lastly, allow students to feel they matter and are respected. Each of these areas are crucial in forming and maintaining an effective counselor-client connection which can assist in current and future effectiveness within the counseling process and ultimately increase student well-being.

References

- Feller, C. & Cottone, R. (2003). The importance of empathy in the therapeutic alliance. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 42(1), 53-62.
- Halstead, R., Wagner, L., Vivero, M., & Ferkol, W. (2002). Counselors' conceptualizations of caring in the counseling relationship. *Counseling and Values*, 47(1), 34-48.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2004). Assessing the multicultural competence of school counselors: a checklist. *Professional School Counseling*, 7(3), 178-187.
- Kelly, E. (1997). Relationship-centered counseling: A humanistic model of integration. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 75(5), 337-345.
- Kolbert, J., Morgan, B., & Brendel, J. (2002). Faculty and student perceptions of dual relationships within counselor education: A qualitative analysis. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 41(3), 193-207.
- Rayle, A. D. (2006). Mattering to others: Implications for the counseling relationship. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84(4), 483-487.
- Tursi, M. & Cochran, J. (2006). Cognitive-behavioral tasks accomplished in a person-centered relational framework. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84(4), 387-397.
- Wigfield, A., Lutz, S., & Wagner, L. (2005). Early adolescents' development across the middle school years: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 9(2), 112-120.